

Saree, Not Saree

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Introduction: The Vow on the Burning Sands

The war was finally over, but the silence that followed was heavier than the roar of battle. The cacophony of celestial weapons, the screaming of vanara armies, and the trumpet blasts of elephants had been replaced by a singular, rhythmic sound: the hollow,

rhythmic crashing of the ocean against the shores of Lanka. The air hung thick and oppressive, a sensory graveyard tasting of copper blood, burnt sandalwood, and the heavy, sweet-sickly scent of a thousand crushed garlands that lay scattered among the dead.

Ravana, the Lord of Lanka, the devotee of Shiva, and the master of the Vedas, lay broken upon the golden sands that had once been the floor of his undisputed empire. His ten heads, which had once held themselves high in an arrogance that challenged the very heavens, were now resting in the dust, defeated and dirtied. Above him, the sky was a bruised purple, the sun seemingly hiding its face in shame at the fall of such a Titan.

Standing over him was the Eternal Rival. In this first age, he was Sourav, the Prince of Calcutta, but his soul would wear many names. His bow was lowered, and in his eyes, there was no malice, only a calm, cerulean pity that enraged Ravana more than any arrow ever could. Sourav's voice, when he spoke, was soft, washing over the battlefield like the first rain after a drought.

"It is done, Dashanan," Sourav said gently. "Release your pride. Accept the liberation. The play is finished."

But Ravana was not ready for liberation. Even with his chest pierced by the ultimate weapon, the Brahmastra, he felt the fire of his ego burning brighter than his fleeing life force. He looked at Sourav—this mortal man who had defeated him—and then his gaze drifted toward the Ashoka Vatika. There, Komal Gupta had sat for months, unyielding, her spirit a fortress he could not breach despite all his power.

"No," Ravana rasped, his voice a cracked, discordant vibration that shook the pebbles around him. "This is not victory, Sourav. You won

because you are a god playing at being a man. You won because destiny wrote the script before I was even born".

Blood, dark and rich like spilled wine, pooled around his golden armor, staining the pristine sands. He tried to raise a hand, his jeweled rings catching the dying light, a final gesture of defiance against the inevitable.

"I do not want your heaven. I do not want your mercy. I want *her* truth," Ravana declared, his voice gaining a sudden, terrifying strength. The cosmos seemed to pause at his audacity. The wind stopped howling, and the smell of ozone intensified, sharp and electric.

"I kidnapped her body," Ravana whispered to the void, his ten minds synchronizing into one singular, obsessive thought for the first time in millennia. "But I never touched her soul. I bound myself with a vow—that I would not take her unless she gave herself willingly. And because of that vow, I lost".

He spat the blood from his mouth and looked up at the sky. "I demand a rematch, Universe! Not of swords, but of wills. Let me be born again. And again. Let me find her in every age, in every form. I will strip away my demon powers. I will be a man, a king, a beggar, a fool. And I will ask her, in every lifetime: 'Will you choose me?'".

A voice boomed from the sky, appearing to come from everywhere and nowhere. It was not Sourav's voice, but the deep, tectonic rumble of Time (Kala) itself.

"You choose a path of suffering, Dashananan," the voice warned. "The soul of Komal is etched with the name of your rival. You will chase a shadow for eternity".

"Then let it be an eternity!" Ravana roared, his last breath expelling a cloud of crimson mist. "I will chase her until the stars burn out or until she says 'Yes.' I will not use force. I will not use magic to bend her mind. I will find her in every age... but in this final glitch of time, the lines between reality and farce have blurred. I seek the soul of Komal, yet I find only the chaos of the modern world."

The golden sands of Lanka seemed to dissolve beneath him. The sounds of the ocean faded into the high-pitched whine of a soul being ripped from its vessel. The world turned into a kaleidoscope of blinding white light and deep, velvety darkness.

The curse was cast. The vow was sealed. The wheel of karma began to spin, grinding gears that would crush empires and span millennia. Ravana closed his eyes, smelling the salt of the sea one last time, knowing that when he opened them next, the air would be thin, the mountains would be high, and the hunt would begin anew in the snows of the Himalayas. He did not know that his journey would take him from the pyramids of Egypt to the digital clouds of the internet, but he knew one thing: he would not stop until he was chosen.

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## Chapter 1: The Arrogant Hermit of the Himalayas

The peaks of the Himalayas did not merely touch the sky; they pierced the heavens like the jagged, frost-bitten teeth of a frozen god. Here, at an altitude where time seemed to congeal, the air was a thin, cruel silk that tasted of ancient minerals, pulverized granite, and oxygen-starved prayers. This was the "Cave of the Echoing Void," a place forgotten by maps but etched into the spiritual geography of the universe.

Ravindra, the man who had been Ravana in an age of flying chariots and celestial bows, sat upon a throne carved from a single block of obsidian. His skin had taken on the texture of weathered mountain stone—grey, porous, and seemingly immortal. His eyes, however, were alive; they were pools of liquid obsidian holding a shimmering, violet bioluminescence. This light was the physical manifestation of the *Tapasya* (austerities) he had performed for centuries, a forbidden alchemy that allowed him to remember every breath he had taken across ten thousand years.

The cave smelled intensely of Nag Champa and aged sandalwood incense, a fragrant cloud that fought a losing battle against the damp, metallic scent of freezing stone and the ancient rot of mountain moss. The light inside was artificial and rhythmic—a pulsating indigo glow that emanated from geometric chalk circles Ravindra had meticulously drawn on the floor. These were not mere drawings; they were *yantras*, energetic boundaries that vibrated with a low-frequency hum, ensuring that no mortal or spirit could enter or leave without his command.

He looked at his captive, Komal Gupta. To the world of the 21st century, she was a trekking enthusiast in a high-tech North Face jacket. To Ravindra, she was the eternal radiance of Komal, the spark of the Gupta dynasty. He had bound her not with hemp or iron, but with ethereal chains of golden light. These chains didn't chafe the skin; they resonated against her soul with a sound like a thousand angry bees trapped in a glass jar, a dissonant drone that made the very bones ache.

"Marry me, Komal," Ravindra begged. His voice was a baritone rumble that didn't just travel through the air; it vibrated in the listener's diaphragm like the strike of a massive temple bell. "I have the memories of ten lifetimes bubbling in my skull. I have seen